



Dissecting the Intersections of *Breast Stories*: An Intersectional Analysis of the Nature of Oppression in Mahasweta Devi's Narratives

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Abstract

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Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* portrays Jashoda, Draupadi, and Gangor by presenting their social realities of oppression. Critical works have been done on these characters from the perspectives of marginalization, subaltern theory, and feminism but no research has explored their intersectional positions to analyze the oppression that they face through Kimberlé Crenshaw's legal theory of Intersectionality which is well applicable in this context. Also, the male characters have been left out from existing research. This paper's intention is to explore such unexplored areas by analyzing the intersections or junctions of both the oppressed and their respective oppressors through Crenshaw's theory of 'Intersectionality'. Such analyses will engender further insight on the influence of intersections in forming the oppressor-oppressed pairings. The theoretical framework has been provided by Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality and some comprehension of intersectional feminism. This paper's intersectional investigation of the oppression observable in Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* shows that - various systems imbue Jashoda, Draupadi and Gangor as well as their oppressors with various modes of identities that work together to create their respective intersections based on which they are either subjugated or empowered and consequently, these intersections themselves inform the binary relationships between oppressed and the oppressors.

Key Words: intersectionality; intersectional feminism; *breast stories*; devi; crenshaw; oppression

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1. Introduction

Mahasweta Devi, a prominent Indian writer, is well known for her depiction of oppression experienced by the underprivileged communities in India. Her collection of *Breast Stories* portrays three female protagonists - Jashoda, Draupadi, and Gangor – who are oppressed and subjugated by men in positions in power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a renowned feminist and critic, introduced Devi to the world by translating her works into English. In the story “Breast Giver,” Jashoda’s motherhood is turned into a commodity and used for economic benefits. In “Draupadi,” Draupadi is raped in police custody by an order issued by the officer in charge. In “Behind the Bodies,” Gangor’s breasts are presented to the media through photography, leading her to get raped twice and forced into prostitution. These forms of exploitation stem from their economic positions, castes, tribes, and other factors. Male characters in the stories such as Kangali, Senanayak, Surja Sahu, and Upin treat the females as objects and do not recognize them as individuals. The wealthy Halder family and the police also discriminate against the women as they hold authoritative power which is derived from their overlapping and interdependent identities. Existing research shows the female characters’

subaltern position and how the female body has been used as a medium of oppression through the lens of feminism. Debaroti Ghosh (2018) explores the gendered marginalization of women in Devi’s stories, showing how they fall victim to the patriarchal society because of their caste, class, or region. Gaganpreet Walia’s (2015) paper deals with how the women of these stories are excluded from the center and treated as objects and gendered subalterns by the state as well as their domestic sphere through the lens of subaltern theory. M.K. Sheeba (2019) discusses the psychological trauma of the female characters in the stories through a feminist point of view. And, Meenakshy N.S. (2007) explores the female breasts as symbols of social, cultural, and economic oppression as the patriarchal society reduces them to objects. However, these stories have not yet been explored through the lens of Intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw which provides a scope to analyze how multiple identities such as class, caste, or region create a vulnerable position for females to face discrimination. This gap in the existing literature, coupled with the prominence of discourse regarding position of females in this day and age, creates a scope for analyzing Devi’s *Breast Stories* through Crenshaw’s theory of Intersectionality.

Therefore, the objective of the study is to analyze the oppression faced by female characters due to intersectional identities. It will also examine the discrimination created by male characters which is enabled by their own intersectional identities. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to explore the binary relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed. As it is a library research, data will be collected from printed books, journals, and online resources. As an analytical research, it will use the analysis of textual data to understand the operations of intersectional discrimination. The section titled “Theoretical Framework” will delve into the theory of Intersectionality and Intersectional feminism as they relate to the analysis in this paper. The section “Junctions of Jashoda, Draupadi and Gangor” will analyze the discourse of the stories to locate the intersections of the central female characters and the oppression they face because of those intersections. “Juxtaposing the Junctions” will analyze the intersections of the oppressors, who are all incidentally males and empowered by those intersections. Moreover, a binary relationship is present between the two groups - the oppressor and the oppressed - where oppressors are in the center and the oppressed females are marginalized. This point will be focused

on and explored in the section “Converging the Crossroads.” These females suffer economic discrimination, physical harassment, and societal oppression not only because of their gender but also due to their multifaceted identities. The essay will investigate the identities of female characters of *Breast Stories* who are molded by various social structures and will seek to observe how these identities work together to place them at particular intersections based on which they are oppressed as well as to analyze the intersections that enable or empower the oppressors to oppress. Furthermore, the investigation will focus on the effect(s) of such intersections or junctions in forming the binary relationships of the oppressors and the oppressed.

2. Theoretical Framework

To investigate the multilayered oppression experienced by the central female characters and perpetuated by the male characters of Mahasweta Devi’s *Breast Stories*, this essay will draw on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality and the consequential intersectional feminism. These theories offer a pertinent theoretical framework to examine the nature of discrimination and oppression that are identified in the story where women are persecuted by men of various positions

because of their gender along with ethnicity or race and social standing or class. As such, a comprehension of these theories is of foremost necessity.

2.1 Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American legal scholar, and civil rights advocate, coined the term 'Intersectionality' in 1989, in her seminal essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics". Here, she discusses how the single-axis framework of feminism and antiracism contributes to the marginalization of black women. She argues that people, particularly black women, experience oppression because of their intersecting identities, such as gender and race. Crenshaw critiques this single-axis framework for its inadequacy to address the unique experiences of black women as it fails to account for them. She says, "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sex cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 140). Her point is that the experiences of black women are not the same as the experiences of white women. Black women are marginalized by the antidiscrimination

doctrine. In the feminist movement, the experiences of black women are also undermined.

In the second essay, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", published in 1991, Crenshaw further focuses on the fallacies of the movements where they tend to ignore that oppression is influenced by gender issues. She makes it clear that a black woman faces both racism and sexism. So, her experiences are to be seen by an 'intersectional' approach because she is oppressed by two factors. Crenshaw says, "My objective in this article is to advance the telling of that location by exploring the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw 1242).

Crenshaw concludes her essay by suggesting that identities are "coalitions." So, to identify the "coalition of women", one needs to consider both white and black females. In her words:

In the context of antiracism, recognizing how the intersectional experiences of women of color are marginalized in prevailing conceptions of identity politics does not require that we give up attempts to organize as communities of color. Rather,

Intersectionality provides a basis for reconceptualizing race as a coalition of between men and women of color. (1299)

So, to put the idea of 'Intersectionality' in simple terms, it is the oppression of people, primarily women, because of their many identities and dimensions based on gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, sexual orientation, and other factors. The term 'Intersectionality' was first used as a legal framework by Crenshaw. However, because of its relevance to the oppression experienced by marginalized characters in various contexts and the different ways in which they are oppressed, the theory can serve as a framework for literary analysis.

Also, Crenshaw, as a black feminist, took the issues of black women to conceptualize 'Intersectionality'. She has entailed how different facets work together to create intersections of oppression. Such theorization does not exclusively deal with race and gender, but can also include geographical location, caste, social class, and ethnicity. Moreover, the experience of oppression due to intersectional identities is not limited solely to the context of Africa or the Caribbean. Similar forms of oppression are present in South Asia too. In India,

Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other colonized countries that are known as third-world countries, women experience discrimination because of their gender, social position, caste, geographical location, and race. Additionally, tribal communities, being minor groups, experience greater oppression from dominant and powerful social groups. So, Crenshaw's 'Intersectionality' is applicable and relevant for South Asian countries where women go through similar oppression. *Devi's Breast Stories* reveals these factors by depicting Jashoda, Draupadi, and Gangor who are oppressed and subject to discrimination because of their intersectional identities. They represent the real scenarios of the Indian subcontinent, where women are easy subjects of oppression. The multifaceted natures of their identities and the resulting oppression allow them to be analyzed through the lens of Intersectionality.

It is noteworthy that Intersectional positions create power or scope for oppression as well. Multiple identities provide the power class more influence, which allows them to oppress the 'weaker' class more easily. A male landlord, for instance, is more likely to oppress people due to his gender and class. Some male characters in *Devi's Breast Stories* are thus powerful because of their intersectional

identities. As a result, they exploit the female characters and establish their authority. So, characters in positions of power and with the ability to oppress can also be analyzed via the theory of Intersectionality. Because of this, it is vital to comprehend how Intersectionality empowers and subjugates people.

2.2 Intersectional Feminism

Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality is closely aligned with the concepts of intersectional feminism. Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach and social movement to address the issues of equity and justice based on sex, gender, gender expression, gender identity, and other aspects of sexuality as they are interpreted by social theories and political activity. Feminism, when combined with Intersectionality, encompasses women from all social classes, races, economic tiers, religious backgrounds, and sexual orientations. Contrary to "white feminism," which focuses on white women, intersectional feminism takes into account the experiences of women of color, LGBTQ women, tribal women, and women from other social backgrounds. As a result, the Intersectional notion has a significant impact on feminist theory. Therefore, intersectional feminism is a branch of feminism that emphasizes how

people are affected differently by oppressive institutions depending on their color, class, ability, sexual orientation, and other factors. While "mainstream feminism" may solely (or mostly) be concerned with issues of gender or sex, intersectional feminism recognizes that oppression is a complex system. (Soken-Huberty).

So, 'Intersectionality' has provided greater scope for the feminist study where women from all social classes, colors, and races are included. The objective was to expose the anti-racist and feminist movement biases. As a result, it may be used to examine the perspectives of women from all over the world and treat them equally. The woman can be a "white" in the black community of South Africa a "black" in the white community of New York or a "Dalit" in India. Because the caste system is so crucial in India, the "Dalit" experiences oppression as a result of her caste. In this case, caste and gender interact to place her in a situation where she is subject to patriarchal oppression as well as that of the upper caste community. These problems, in which a woman is subject to discrimination because of their multifaceted identities, are addressed by Intersectionality.

3. Junctions of Jashoda, Draupadi and Gangor

Jashoda, Draupadi, and Gangor are the three protagonists of Devi's *Breast Stories*, through whom she has portrayed the harsh realities of women in their marginalized positions. They are excluded from mainstream society and the hegemonic power structure. They are oppressed and subjugated by their multifaceted identities, including gender, social position, caste, economy, etc. All these identities create a complex path where these women are vulnerable and exposed to exploitation. The junctions of their multiple identities play a crucial role in making them suffer oppression by the powerful community who are included in the hegemonic structure.

3.1 Breast Giver

Jashoda, the main character of the story "Breast Giver," is a middle-class Brahmin woman. Due to an accident caused by the wealthy landlord Haldar's son, her husband Kangali becomes paralyzed. Given their wealth and fear of the Brahmin curse, the wealthy Haldar family tries to provide for Jashoda's family. Jashoda is hired for their grandchildren as a "suckling mother" because of her capacity to produce adequate milk for the babies. Jashoda becomes a professional mother in exchange for "daily meals, clothes on feast days, and some monthly pay" (Devi 49). To breastfeed those children, she also has

to stay pregnant. Thus she gets "twenty children, living or dead" (39). After the family's daughter-in-laws stop having more babies, Jashoda loses her usefulness as a wet nurse and takes the role of the family cook. Some years later, she has breast cancer but does not get timely treatment. As a result, she suffers miserably and dies alone with no children by her side.

It is notable that Jashoda's family is under the sole authority of the Haldar family. They take control of her family and life after Kangali becomes physically disabled. It is clearly shown in the story that her position in society depends on her husband as she becomes a victim of oppression after the accident of him. The sons of the Haldar family consider appointing Jashoda as a wet nurse to preserve their wives' physical beauty. In this way, they can continue to gratify their carnal desires, have children, and preserve the beauty of their wives. Devi narrates:

The second son impregnates his wife at the same frequency, but behind it lies deep love. ... He thinks a lot about how to combine multiple pregnancies and beauty, but he cannot fathom it. But today, hearing from his wife about Jashoda's surplus milk, the second

son said all of a sudden, 'Way found.'

...

"It will, it will, ... You'll breed yearly and keep your body. (50)

Later when Jashoda develops breast cancer, no one cares for her treatment. So, the contrast is noticeable. Because of her lower position in society, her life and family do not have their own authority. Anything she gets comes from the Haldar family. They are like her "master", who is in control of everything he has. In the end, she suffers alone in cancer with no one by her side. Devi depicts the final moments of her life:

Jashoda thought, after all, she had suckled the world, could she die alone? . . . One must become Jashoda if one suckles the world. One has to die friendless, with no one left to put a bit of water in the mouth. Yet someone was supposed to be there at the end. Who was it? It was who? Who was it? (74)

Jashoda's identity as a Brahmin helps her to survive because the Haldar family helps Kangali after the accident simply due to the fear of being cursed. Jashoda gets appointed as a wet nurse not only because of her enormous breast but

also due to her caste. Being a Brahmin, she has a high status in society. But as a poverty-stricken woman, her identity as a Brahmin does not save her from getting exploited. Her caste gives her some prestige, but her gender and social class dominate it and make her a subject of oppression by the Haldar family. Her multifaceted identity plays a vital role here.

In Jashoda's life, there are other oppressors besides the Haldar family. Although her husband Kangali views her as his property, he does not object to the idea of utilizing her breast milk to make profit. He becomes dubious about her chastity after his accident. That suggests that he feels entitled to her body in some way. Jashoda considers her husband to be her "guru" as well. Devi illustrates:

Kangali said, "What? When I wasn't there, you were getting off with Nabin?" Jashoda then grabbed Kangali's suspicious head between the two hemispheres of the globe and said, "Two maid servants from the big house slept here every day to guard me. Would I look at Nabin? Am I not your faithful wife? (43)

For the twenty-five years Jashoda worked as a professional mother, Kangali

was by her side. When she is sick with cancer, he deserts her and refuses to even go see her. When he learns she won't recover from the disease, he doesn't even feel bad for her. It is apparent from the statement that "Kangali did not like the talk." His mind has already rejected Jashoda. Ultimately, he comes to the conclusion that Jashoda is a "distant person for a long time" and that his sons are only his sons (73).

It is clear from the textual evidence already discussed in this essay that Kangali and Jashoda are from the same social class, but because he is a man, he has the power to take advantage of her. Despite the fact that he is being used by the more powerful Haldar family, her intersectional identities give him control over her. On the other side, because of her social position and gender, Jashoda is taken advantage of by both of them. As a result of these two things coming together, she is now subject to two different kinds of tyranny. She cannot escape the fact that she is a poor woman who depends on both her husband and the 'master' Haldar family, despite the fact that she is a member of the prominent caste of Brahmins in India. Her one strong identity cannot overpower the other weaker ones. Jashoda thus experiences discrimination from the Haldar family and her spouse throughout her life. According

to Crenshaw's thesis of Intersectionality, women who have several identities related to their gender and race experience double oppression. Jashoda experiences persecution and discrimination from the Haldar family and her husband as a result of her intersectional identity as a middle-class woman with a family to support. Jashoda's suffering from her complex identities—produced by her gender and social class—can be understood in light of Crenshaw's thesis of Intersectionality. The other weaker identities cannot be eliminated by her one powerful identity. As a result, Jashoda suffers discrimination throughout her life by the Haldar family as well as her husband. From Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality, it is identified that multiple identities associated with gender and race make women face double oppression. In the story, Jashoda's intersectional identities as a middle-class woman who has a family to feed place her in a situation where she is subject to oppression and discrimination from the Haldar family and her husband. Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality sheds light on understanding Jashoda's suffering for her multifaceted identities that are produced by her gender and social standing.

3.2 Draupadi

“Draupadi” is the name of another short story by Mahasweta Devi from the collection *Breast Stories*. It takes place in West Bengal in 1971, a politically charged locale. Draupadi Mejhen, a young Santhal woman and Naxalite activist, is the protagonist of “Draupadi.” She, her husband, Dulna Majhi, and their accomplices are responsible for the murder of Bakuli's landlord Surja Sahu. So, the police look for Draupadi because she is “most notorious female. Long wanted in many...” (Devi 19).

Senanayak is a Bengali military officer who is well acquainted with the tactics used by the tribal fighters. Despite his claim of respecting the opposition, he wants to destroy them. He intends to track down Draupadi after his men kill Dulna. Following Dulna's death, Draupadi continues to remain hidden using the pseudonym Upi Mejhen. She can't get away for long since the police ultimately catch her. Senanayak then gives a command to his men, "Make her. Do the needful" (34). Then a group of police officers viciously rape Draupadi. She experiences the violence on her body and observes it deliriously as she regains consciousness. Devi describes:

In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts and understands that she's been

made right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven- then Draupadi had passed out. (34-35)

The police ask Draupadi to get clothed before they can send her to Senanayak after her rape. She refuses to cover up the signs of abuse and to be made to feel ashamed. The police and Senanayak are disturbed by this and confused of how to deal with this woman who compels them to recognize their own depravity. When Senanayak asks her about her clothes, she says, “What’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?” (36).

So, Draupadi is subjected to physical abuse for a variety of reasons. The textual evidence discussed previously depicts that she is a member of the Santhal tribe, a tiny ethnic group found in Bangladesh and India. She joined her husband in the Naxalite movement, turning into a rebel who needs to be put down as soon as possible. Therefore, it has political motivations. After capturing Draupadi, Senanayak gives the order to “make her” because he felt that the ultimate punishment for a woman is not murder but rape. As a result, while in police custody, Draupadi is raped by numerous officers. As Crenshaw demonstrates in her theory of

Intersectionality, multiple identities create a position from where women are easily oppressed. Draupadi's gender has certainly played a part in helping her face the oppression from the powerful mainstream people of society. Her identities are - a woman, a minor tribe, a criminal, and a rebel Naxalite. As a Naxalite rebel, she is considered as a threat to the state. For killing Surja Sahu, the powerful landlord, she must face the consequences. So, all these identities make Draupadi a subject to face discrimination and oppression from the police who are undoubtedly more powerful than her. Therefore, it is evident that Draupadi's intersecting identities as a woman, a Santhal, a Naxalite rebel and a wanted criminal account for the oppression that she experiences.

3.3 Behind the Bodice

“Behind the Bodice” is the last story of the *Breast Stories*. In the story, Gangor is a brick kiln laborer who lives between Jharoa and Seopura, where Upin, a photographer from Kolkata, goes to take photos. He discovers Gangor breastfeeding her baby and takes some photos of her. Devi writes:

A high breasted rural woman sits slack with her breast shoved into an infant's mouth. The breast is covered with the end of her cloth.

The same girl is walking with many girls carrying water on her head. Breasts overflowing like full pitchers. (Devi 143)

She does not realize the potential threat that is coming for her. Instead, she demands some money from him for the photos, “Put out her hand for money. Snap a photo so give me cash!” (144). The photos are published in the media where the breastfeeding breasts are sexualized and commercialized in the name of art. “Her breasts are like the cave paintings of Ajanta, against the backdrop of the sky” (145). Gangor describes her miserable condition to Upin after she realizes the oppression that she has faced:

Tell the camera- Sir, why not take me away? A cloth to wear . . . a bite to eat . . . a place to sleep for mother and child . . . what to do Sir . . . no field, no land, living is very hard . . . pots and pans . . . stove and knife . . . cleaning room . . . laundry . . . I'll do anything Sir . . . (146)

The photos of Gangor's breasts catch the lusty attention of the people and as a result she gets raped. Critic Mary Louisa Cappelli says, “The Photograph ends up stealing Gangor's reproductive livelihood by forcing her into a sexually

coded spotlight of patriarchal attention, sexual fantasy and community disgust, pushing Upin unto the broader land ledge of insanity and ultimate death” (Cappelli 50).

When she files a case against it to seek justice, she gets raped again at the police station. The brutality is so intense that her breasts are removed from her body. After the rape, the society does not accept her anymore so she has to take prostitution because there was no choice left for her. Upin does not realize the horrible consequence Gangor goes through until he visits her again, “No breasts. Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat, the two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin- gang rape... biting and tearing gang rape... police... a court case... again gang rape in the lockup” (157).

It is clear that Upin’s thoughtless photographs where he showed Gangor’s body to the media are responsible for Gangor’s rape. But Gangor’s identities also play a part here. She is a poverty stricken untouchable, tribal woman living in a village far from the mainstream urban places. These make her an easy subject to oppression by all means. It gets more evident when she goes to file a case against the rape and gets raped again by the police. They know that an untouchable

woman does not have any power to do anything against them.

Gangor's miserable reality stemming from Upin's photographs and her decision to become a prostitute is distinguished by her multiple identities. From the textual evidence discussed earlier, it is seen that she is a member of the untouchables, who are marginalized by the dominant society. As a laborer, she is oppressed by the powerful Mahajan. After getting raped, she is excluded from her own society. Finally, she had to take prostitution as her profession to survive. So, it is evident that Gangor’s oppression is not the result of her being a woman or an untouchable solely. Her being a woman along with an untouchable who lives in a rural area and works as a laborer and later a prostitute- all of these factors work behind making her oppressed. In her theory of Intersectionality, Crenshaw talks about these multifaceted identities that make a woman more exposed to violation and oppression. In the case of Gangor, her gender, caste, and social standing- all these intersectional identities contribute to making her more assailable to discrimination.

4. Intersecting the Crossroads of the Oppressors

Breast Stories presents several male characters that are empowered by their overlapping identities and for those they stand in positions that give them authoritative and discriminatory power. Gender is not the only factor that gives them the power to exploit the women. They are privileged by the patriarchal social structure where they hold the central position. Also, they are the mainstream for their economy, social class, and caste. All the factors work together to give them the power to subjugate women.

4.1 Breast Giver

In the story "Breast Giver," Jashoda is forced to become a wet nurse due to her husband Kangali's accident. The Haldar family exercises dominance over Kangali and Jashoda in the name of generosity. They take control of Kangali's family due to their higher social status. Mr. Haldar wants to build Kangali a shop which is a way of taking economic control over their family. Thus, for the helpless Jashoda and Kangali, they seem to be a savior. Jashoda takes on the role of a professional mother who feeds the children in exchange for food, clothing, and money. She is discarded when she is no longer useful for them. Their dominance is further reinforced when she was diagnosed with breast cancer and the decision of treatment was made by the Haldar family.

Mr. Haldar is a member of the wealthy elite and a landowner whose power stems from economic status as well as patriarchal power structure. Even though Jashoda is a Brahmin, her financial situation makes her caste privilege ineffective to shield her from getting exploited. Due to their social standing, the entire Haldar family is given dominance over Jashoda's family. Thus, the overlapping intersectional identity is apparent in this case. The men of Haldar family are put in a position from where they can manage a poor family because of the gender and economic class from where they belong.

Despite having a similar economic situation to Jashoda, Kangali takes advantage of her since he is her husband and a man. He treats her body as an object and asserts ownership over but deserts her when she develops cancer. Her perception of herself as a "Goddess" or "mother" is indirectly manipulated by him. Her chastity is yet another thing that worries him. These factors all point to Kangali's objectification of Jashoda's body. She is viewed less as a person and more as a mother and a woman who must carry out her responsibilities.

A thorough analysis of Kangali's intersectional position reveals that he is a man and Jashoda's husband for which the

patriarchal system grants him the authority to exploit her. The fact that he is a husband gives him more power to take advantage of Jashoda in the social structure of India where a husband is often regarded as a dominant figure and can wield control over their wives. Kangali is, therefore, empowered despite the fact that he lacks the economic power of the Haldar family due to his status in the patriarchal social order.

4.2 Draupadi

“Draupadi” portrays an indigenous woman named Draupadi who, after killing Surja Sahu, an upper-caste land owner, is included on the police's "wanted" list. Police rape her in the custody after capturing her. She is a figure of resistance because she joins the Naxalite movement and harbors aspirations to overthrow the police, bankers, and landowners. Senanayak, a military officer, is appointed by the government to imprison Draupadi. Adamant about getting her by any means necessary, he uses a variety of techniques to capture her. Before bringing Draupadi to justice, he orders his men to rape her. As a man, he holds a powerful position in the society which gives him the allowance of domination. Being appointed by the State to suppress the Naxalite rebel, his authority is further extended.

Like Senanayak, Surja Sahu gets empowered by his intersecting identities being a wealthy landowner. He dominates the lower class people through his economic privilege. In the story, Devi says:

“Surja Sahu arranged with Biddhibabu to dig two tube wells and three wells within the compound of his two houses. No water anywhere, drought in Birbhum. Unlimited water a Surja Sahu’s house, as clear as a crow’s eye.” (Devi 29)

Devi indicates that Surja Sahu uses his position of authority to repress the local minorities. His oppression becomes more evident when Dulna admits his real intention for killing Surja - “I’ll have the first blow, brothers. My great- grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labor to repay the debt” (30). It shows the systematic oppression that the landowners exercise over generation after generation.

Both Senanayak and Surja Sahu’s power stem from their intersecting identities where social position and economic status give them dominance. In addition to their gender, their significant economic and social privilege as a landowner and a policeman makes them more

powerful and allows them to oppress tribal minorities like Draupadi and Dulna.

4.3 Behind the Bodice

In the story, “Behind the Bodice,” Gangor’s breasts are exposed to the public by the photographer Upin. She is raped twice and becomes a prostitute as a result of the incident. Notably, her second rape took place while she was being held by the police. Literary critic, Sushil Sarkar, in his paper, asks the question, “Who is responsible for the miserable condition of the protagonist?” (Sarkar 10).

Upin’s photography makes Gangor’s breast exposed to the society through media. Being a representative of the mainstream urban society, Upin cannot realize Gangor’s reality. The image of Gangor’s breast is a commodity to him. Sarkar comes to the conclusion, “Therefore, Gangor’s breasts’ photography grasps the consumer’s attention and brings a huge profit to Upin as a symbol of exotic Oriental, primitive representation of underdogs India” (12).

As a male, Upin fits into the dominant patriarchal structure of the Indian society. He is given power by the patriarchy from this position. He is a representative of the urban Kolkata as well. His gender and social standing, thus, give him the power to use Gangor’s body

as a commodity and a mere object of his photography. He does not directly oppress Gangor, but because of his social standing, he cannot comprehend the intensity of his work. So, a crucial factor in Gangor’s oppression in this case is Upin’s overlapping intersectional identities.

Gangor experiences two gang rapes, which proves the sexual oppression that she has to go through by men around her. After the gang rape, she was raped again by the police, who are comparable to Senanayak from “Draupadi”. Because of their intersectional position, they are more powerful than the untouchable Dalits as the state gives them the power to uphold the rule of law. As a result, they are in a dominant position as opposed to the Dalits.

So Upin, the rapists of Gangor and the police all are privileged by their gender and other social identities. Due to her overlapping identities, which are characterized by her gender and social standing, the police find it easy to sexually assault her. They are in a position to discriminate against individuals who are marginalized and excluded from the hegemonic power structure which has been portrayed in the story.

5. Converging the Crossroads

In each of the three stories, there are some characters that are strengthened by their

intersecting identities. They have a special place in the power system where they seem as an oppressor for those who are seen as an 'other' because of their gender, social class, economic situation, and social structures. Both the social order and the state enable this 'othering'. Draupadi and Gangor were sexually assaulted by the police while they were under their custody. Despite the State's assurances of protection, the police fall short. As a result of being a part of the societal norm, they are powerful and have access to everything. Upin can visit rural places and display a woman's body to the media without considering the repercussions. The police can rape a victim without worrying about being held accountable in court. Senanayak, despite being a higher ranking officer, does not care about the law while giving the order to rape Draupadi because he knows that she can never seek justice for herself. So, there is a definite distinction between the two communities. Due to their gender, caste, and ethnicity, Gangor and Draupadi are both subject to discrimination. They are ostracized and left out of the mainstream society.

Jashoda is not physically raped, but her treatment is just as harsh as theirs. Her motherhood and body were objectified and used for benefits of others. She became a victim of the Haldar family's capitalist

viewpoints. They oppress her because of their dominance in society and the economy. Social structure and patriarchy were to blame for her oppression. Kangali takes advantage of her as a husband and a man. Jashoda has spent her entire life being taken advantage of by the Haldar family since she is a female and less wealthy than they are.

Analyzing the three stories, the oppression and discrimination against women are quite clear to see. Jashoda, Draupadi and Gangor's suffering is a result of their social standing, race, ethnicity, economic standing, as well as their gender. They are far from the center and therefore regarded as 'other'. Characters from different social classes, such as Kangali, Haldar Babu, Senanayak, Surja Sahu, and Upin, nonetheless, exploit the women. Devi exposes the corrupt State policies that further victimize women by attacking police violence in "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice." Despite having a high caste, Jashoda is economically poor. In the stronger social framework, she is a victim due to her gender and social position. Because of their overlapping identities, there is a binary interaction between the oppressors and the oppressed.

According to Crenshaw's theory, Intersectionality leads to the formation of the two parties necessary for oppression.

She claims that having multiple overlapping identities gives one person more leverage to take advantage of the other. She refers to race and gender. However, depending on the circumstances, other identities such as social class, ethnicity, and economic standing may also work well to establish the binary relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed.

This dynamic is vividly portrayed in the *Breast Stories* by Devi through the women as Jashoda, Draupadi and Gangor who endure oppression by powerful men around them. It exposes the harsh realities of women in India where they are exploited due to their gender as well as other intersecting identities related to economy, race and ethnicity.

6. Conclusion

Using Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality, this paper demonstrates how the identities of the central characters from Devi's *Breast Stories* are affected and molded by different social structures, such as caste, social position, economic position, ethnicity, tribe, etc., that place them in a specific intersection from where they are oppressed. This paper also analyzes the intersections that enable or empower male members. Besides, it investigates the effects of these

intersections in constructing the binary relationships between the oppressors and the oppressed. *Breast Stories*, by depicting Jashoda, Draupadi, and Gangor, portrays the discrimination and oppression they face due to their economic position, ethnicity, tribe, and caste. Gender makes them separate from the center because of the patriarchal social structure. As a result, the male members and the mainstream community who are rich and socially powerful get an authoritative and oppressing power over the women. Mr. Haldar and his family, Kangali, Senanayak, Surja Sahu, Upin, and the Police exercise their authority and power to oppress the women around them in different forms. Along with gender, women are further marginalized by their economy, caste, and tribe. As Crenshaw points out in her theory of Intersectionality, overlapping and interconnected identities create an Intersection that makes women doubly oppressed and subjugated. So, gender, ethnicity, economy, tribe, and caste work together for women as well as men to give them unique intersectional positions. From here, the women are marginalized and the men are empowered. Therefore, they construct a binary relationship between them which is the oppressor-oppressed pairing.

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